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Chairperson: Ms. Gittens-Joseph ..... (Trinidad and Tobago)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 104: Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons (*continued*) (A/C.3/55/L.6)

Introduction of draft resolution

Draft resolution A/C.3/55/L.6: "Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing"

1. **Mr. Galerón de Miguel** (Spain) said that his delegation joined with that of the Dominican Republic in introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors. Bangladesh, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jamaica, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam had also become sponsors.

2. He said that the text was drawn mainly from General Assembly resolutions 54/24 and 54/262, by which the General Assembly had decided to convene a Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002. The Second World Assembly on Ageing was to give particular attention to, inter alia, linkages between ageing and development, with particular attention to the needs, priorities and perspectives of developing countries. After summarizing the provisions of operative paragraphs 2, 3, 5 and 6 of the draft resolution, he recalled that earlier General Assembly resolutions on ageing had attracted solid political support, and that such support was essential if the Second World Assembly on Ageing was to be crowned with success. He hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

3. **Ms. Gómez** (Colombia) and **Ms. Simonovic** (Croatia) said that their countries had also become sponsors.

4. **The Chairperson** stated that Romania had also become a sponsor.

Agenda item 107: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/55/3, A/55/38, A/55/271, A/55/293, A/55/308, A/55/322, A/55/385, A/55/399, A/55/138-S/2000/693, A/55/162-S/2000/715, A/C.3/55/3 and A/C.3/55/4)

Agenda item 108: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century (*continued*) (A/55/341, A/55/74, A/55/162-S/2000/715 and A/C.3/55.4)

5. **Ms. Rambøll** (Norway) said that the Millennium Summit held in September 2000 had set ambitious goals with regard to the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development and gender equality. A factor that would be helpful in attaining those goals was that the goals in question were interlinked: the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women were effective ways to reduce poverty and stimulate sustainable development.

6. In his report on the new millennium (A/54/2000), the Secretary-General had called attention to the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which required concerted action at the international level, especially with respect to women and girls. Women and girls would be less vulnerable to that scourge if they were more fully empowered, and they would be better able to protect themselves against it if equity were the rule in all fields—health, education, the environment, the economy. But that would require major changes in the relationship between women and men, and men must be engaged as partners in fighting AIDS. Action against AIDS at all levels was a top priority in Norway's development cooperation. The Government had suggested doubling the 2001 budget allocation for that purpose.

7. With respect to the issue of gender equality, the key was the economic and social empowerment of women. Nothing else could put an end to violence against them and enable them to protect their physical and moral integrity and achieve their rights. However, those outcomes would be realized only if men shared power with women, and that in turn would require men to understand that by doing so they would be able to live more enriching and more balanced lives.

8. One area where there was much to be gained from increased involvement of women was in relation to peace processes. It was essential to ensure the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making and implementation of peace processes, including conflict prevention and resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

9. The Commission on the Status of Women had played an important role in promoting women's rights, but its mandate and working methods should be regularly reviewed. The results of the Commission's consideration, in 2001, of the issue of multiple discrimination would be an important contribution to the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that would be held later in the year. Norway welcomed the fact that so much attention was being paid to the issue of multiple discrimination, as women were disproportionately affected by discrimination on the basis of race, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity.

10. In June 2000, at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", an impressive commitment to gender equality had been made by Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. While the special session had shown that there was still a long way to go before that objective was attained, it had provided fresh impetus and inspiration. Its outcome would not have been the same without the active participation of non-governmental organizations. Partnership between Governments and non-governmental organizations was indispensable, and in Norway, it was a reality.

11. Norway had pursued an active policy for gender equality for decades, but had not yet succeeded in fully mainstreaming the gender perspective in all sectors of society. Accordingly, it had recently initiated a process to ensure that a gender perspective was integrated into the national budget.

12. **Mr. N'Dry** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, with reference to agenda item 108, women had achieved a measure of empowerment in most areas of social activity since 1995. It was gratifying that men, children and young people were participating in the process, which had enabled women to make substantial progress and feel that they had allies in their struggle. The Beijing Platform for Action included specific measures aimed at facilitating the empowerment of women and promoting their integration into society. Governments were increasingly favourable to the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and that was a welcome development. The fact that women had come to occupy key positions which had formerly been reserved for men was the result of just such resolute action.

13. In Côte d'Ivoire, women were coming to consider themselves increasingly integrated into society, and played a preponderant role in the community; their voices were heard and their suggestions taken into account in important matters. They had also come to enjoy a measure of legal protection whereby they could choose their husbands freely; the minimum lawful age of marriage for girls had been set at 18, and such customs as dowry and polygamy had been abolished. Outmoded, harmful practices such as early marriage and excision had come to be strongly condemned and opposed. Indeed, on 23 December 1998, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire had adopted legislation prohibiting violence against women, including such practices as sexual harassment, early marriage, forced marriage and genital mutilation, and establishing a Family Code, thereby strengthening the position of women in society.

14. In the field of health, the living conditions of mothers and children had improved. Reproductive health and family planning services had been broadened and strengthened, and local organizations had initiated projects aimed at improving women's health conditions and providing them with information about vaccinating their children, nutrition and hygiene, as well as various aspects of women's health.

15. In the economic field, women were playing an increasingly prominent role, thanks to access to microcredit and effective backing by the Government and non-governmental organizations. In the villages, women were encouraged to form groups through which they could obtain support for their farming and food product marketing activities. Women played a key role in agricultural production, representing as they did 71 per cent of the labour force in that sector and accounting for 60 to 80 per cent of all production. In the field of education, illiteracy among women had been markedly reduced, thanks to, inter alia, awareness campaigns and various other measures that had helped to promote school attendance among girls, especially in regions characterized by low enrolment rates.

16. Despite such laudable progress, women still faced serious social problems. Poverty and unemployment rates were highest among women, with the result that they were vulnerable to such scourges as alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence and prostitution.

Frequently they were relegated to an inferior status in the community, and hence women in general, and African women in particular, found themselves in difficulty where basic services and access to education were not available. In such situations, their ability to participate fully in the development of the society in which they lived might be seriously jeopardized. To remove the obstacles confronting them, Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society should act forthwith to live up to the commitments they had made since the Fourth World Conference on Women. Côte d'Ivoire, for its part, wished to reaffirm its determination to implement concrete measures aimed at mainstreaming a gender perspective in all aspects of the country's development, despite its current economic difficulties.

17. The inequality and suffering that women still had to endure could be alleviated only if all concerned committed themselves unhesitatingly to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration. The women of the entire world must participate fully in taking decisions on issues of direct concern to them. Their determination to take their fate into their own hands must find expression in firm solidarity and stronger motivation with a view to reducing the continuing disparities between themselves and men.

18. **Ms. Toe** (Burkina Faso) said that her delegation favoured the adoption of policies designed to encourage men to involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality, as called for in the Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session (S-23/2). She urged all Governments to integrate all policies relating to women more fully, and to assess activities undertaken in that connection on a regular basis, in order to ensure that by 2005 genuine progress would have been made toward betterment of the status of women throughout the world. She also emphasized that it was urgently necessary for Governments, with the help of regional and international organizations, to incorporate a gender perspective into national development plans as an essential component of development, and to strive unstintingly to put fully into effect the national action plans they had prepared for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

19. The women's associations of Burkina Faso, on the occasion of their national march on Boromo — which would carry on to New York in another two weeks, in the context of the World March of Women 2000 — had submitted 11 urgent recommendations to the Head of State. The Government, for its part, had prepared an inventory of obstacles to the full and meaningful development of women and girl children in Burkina Faso, and had undertaken to organize, in November 2000, a national forum for the promotion of women and girl children, with a view to providing both urban and rural women with an opportunity of putting forward proposals for action and concrete measures aimed at enhancing their status and that of their daughters. A further goal of the forum would be to achieve a greater measure of concerted action by the Government, civil society and the various development stakeholders for the purpose of implementing the recommendations contained in the Beijing Platform for Action and in the Political Declaration adopted at the twenty-third special session.

20. The delegation of Burkina Faso wished to encourage the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the measures it was taking with a view to facilitating and promoting women's participation in decision-making in all areas of critical importance for the world's future. Similarly, with reference to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, her delegation supported the holding of a general discussion and exchange of views between the organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations at the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to be held in January and February 2001.

21. **Mr. Barsky** (Russian Federation) expressed satisfaction at the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, which had shown that despite all efforts to date, much work remained to be done in pursuit of the objectives set by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The outcome document (S-23/3) clearly stated that societies could not hope to attain their political, economic and social objectives in the absence of full participation by women.

22. His delegation was gratified to note that the outcome document rightly emphasized the problems of women in the countries in transition, which were enduring the consequences of radical changes in economic relations and the negative effects sometimes produced by globalization. It was to be hoped that

United Nations specialized agencies and international and regional organizations would proceed with the measures set forth in the outcome document with a view to helping the Governments of countries in transition to develop and implement plans and programmes aimed at making a broader range of economic and political opportunities available to women.

23. It was, of course, incumbent upon national Governments first and foremost to find solutions to the problems confronting women, and that was why the Russian Federation's Governmental Committee on the Status of Women had recently met to consider how to implement the decisions of the special session of the General Assembly and set priorities in that connection. A national action plan to promote the status of women during the period 2001-2005 had been prepared, the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would be considered shortly, and legislation on constitutional guarantees for equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women was in the final drafting stages. Moreover, consideration was being given to the establishment of governmental bodies expressly mandated to monitor the observance of constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality between the sexes. A large proportion of the country's population, and nearly half its labour force, consisted of women, and consequently it was of the utmost importance that women should play an active part in the socio-economic transformation currently under way.

24. While it was true that women still had to contend with poverty, unemployment and discrimination, there were no valid grounds for placing excessive emphasis on the phenomenon of violence against women in countries in transition, especially the unlawful exporting of women for purposes of sexual exploitation; such emphasis suggested bias and prejudice. His delegation wished to make it clear that the decisions of the special session of the General Assembly could be implemented only provided the gender issue was depoliticized.

25. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the States Members of the Rio Group (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) and the Caribbean States, said that in those countries, attainment of the objective of gender equality was an ongoing challenge, not only for State institutions but also for non-governmental organizations and women's associations. Some programmes were only in their initial stages; others, however, were much further advanced and had led to the acquisition of valuable experience, which was shared with the national and regional entities concerned.

26. A large number of agreements attested to the importance which the countries of the Rio Group attached to the question of the status of women, including, in particular, the Port of Spain Consensus, approved at the Third Caribbean Ministerial Conference on Women in October 1999, the Lima Consensus, adopted at the Eighth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean on 10 February 2000, and the Declaration of Panama, adopted by the Ministers with responsibility for women's affairs of the Latin American countries, as part of the preparations for the Tenth Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, to be held in Panama City on 17 and 18 November 2000. By way of additional evidence, the vestiges of discrimination contained in certain laws had been eliminated, and various issues of direct or indirect relevance for women were publicly debated, such as the role that the State could play in correcting inequalities, the participation of civil society in public life, the eradication of violence against women, recognition of the sexual and reproductive rights of women, and the like.

27. The countries of the Rio Group were persuaded that the new initiatives agreed upon at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly could soon be translated into concrete programmes. They attached particular importance to the appeal made to the regional commissions by the Economic and Social Council to develop within their respective mandates and resources a database on all projects and programmes of the agencies and programmes of the United Nations. The establishment of such a database would facilitate the follow-up and evaluation of the projects and programmes in question, and would undoubtedly contribute to better coordination. In the specific case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the relevant database had already been developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, demonstrating the commitment of the countries of that region to the Council's goal.

28. The countries of the Rio Group also attached particular importance to research, the dissemination of specialized material, and training as instruments for elaborating and executing plans and programmes for the advancement of women. Accordingly, they wished to reiterate their appreciation for the excellent work done by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), despite its limited human and material resources. They appealed to all countries to support the Institute and do their utmost to ensure that it would be able to continue in operation.

29. A majority of Latin American countries had acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and hoped to be able to ratify it in the near future.

30. **Mr. Simón Padrós** (Argentina) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the Colombian delegation on behalf of the countries of the Rio Group. He wished to reiterate that Argentina was firmly resolved to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action fully and effectively, and that it endorsed the measures and initiatives contained in the outcome document adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session (S-23/2). It was significant that the delegation of Argentina at that session had included many representatives of non-governmental organizations from all sectors of civil society: Argentina was determined to strengthen national mechanisms for enhancing the status of women and incorporating a gender perspective into all its programmes and policies, and to that end hoped that it could continue to rely on the support and cooperation of non-governmental organizations and civil society. The Government had assigned high priority to the task of consolidating the gains that the international community had made in recent decades in the field of human rights. In 1994, the main international human-rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, had been incorporated into the country's Constitution. It was thus apparent that with respect to human rights, a genuinely national policy was being pursued, one involving the broadest possible spectrum of individuals and organizations active in the life of the country.

31. It was gratifying that the Optional Protocol to the Convention had been adopted. It was to be hoped that Argentina would soon be able to join the ranks of the countries that had ratified the Protocol. In the view of his delegation, CEDAW should be provided with the human and financial resources it needed in order to do its work, especially in connection with the effective implementation of the Optional Protocol.

32. On the other hand, his delegation regretted that the objective of universal ratification of the Convention by the year 2000 had not been attained, and hoped that it would be attained shortly. As far as the regional context was concerned, in 1998 the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) had established a special group on women which had the authority to make recommendations to member countries in matters of concern to women; a number of non-governmental organizations were associated with the group. At the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the States Members of MERCOSUR and the associated countries had reaffirmed their commitment to shared values and interests with respect to gender equality, and had decided to continue their cooperation on the basis of a common agenda (document A/S-23/11).

33. His delegation welcomed the measures that the Secretary-General proposed to take to continue the implementation of the Platform for Action and give effect to the outcome document of the special session. In that connection, it would like to see the Secretary-General ensure that United Nations staff members, both at Headquarters and in the field, received training on gender mainstreaming in their activities. It also supported the efforts that the Secretary-General would be devoting to the task of ensuring that gender balance and the principle of equitable geographic representation were taken into account in appointments of special representatives and special envoys. Similarly, it was to be hoped that the Assembly would, in accordance with the outcome document, invite the relevant United Nations bodies to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and economic and trade-related policies and programmes. Lastly, his delegation hoped that the Commission on the Status of Women, of which Argentina would become a member for its forty-fifth session in March 2001, would take into account the need to implement the Platform for Action and the outcome document in full, and would integrate them into its own work programme. In particular, the education of women and girls,

participation by women in political and economic life, eradication of the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and the problem of the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among women in developing countries should continue to be regarded as being of the utmost importance.

34. **Mrs. Latham** (Netherlands) said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had also been meant for women, and consequently human rights were also women's rights. While those rights had been enshrined in a number of instruments, there remained a considerable discrepancy between principle and practice, raising the question of the international community's credibility and accountability. By way of illustration, she mentioned the case of Lea, a woman who, like millions of other women engaged in a daily struggle for the effective exercise of their fundamental rights, had hoped all her life that some day she could lead an emancipated life in the spirit of the Universal Declaration. In the poverty and colonialism of the country where she had been born, Lea had first had to confront racism, sexism, discrimination and a host of other barriers. After migrating to the West, she found herself, along with women from very different backgrounds, confronted with different forms of gender discrimination, such as exclusion from employment, financial and economic disadvantage, prejudice, sexual harassment, the difficulty of combining employment with family responsibilities, arranged marriages, and violence against women in all its forms. At the age of 55, Lea had been turned down for a job for which she was eminently qualified on the grounds of her age. Many women spent their lives struggling for equal rights and raising a family only to run into the final barrier of age discrimination.

35. Human rights — including, by definition, women's rights — were violated wherever the principles of the Universal Declaration were ignored. Behaviour that conflicted with human rights should not be tolerated, and consequently there could be no excuse for abuse and discrimination against women, including trafficking in women, domestic violence, genital mutilation and "crimes of honour". There was only one ethical yardstick, and all were agreed on it: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It should be implemented for all, without distinction as to sex.

36. The emancipation movement throughout the world was like a landscape with peaks and valleys. The legal instruments that dictated a world of equal rights for men and women were the peaks — witness the recent example of the Optional Protocol to the Convention — while the valleys consisted of distorted perceptions, wrong thinking and reprehensible attitudes towards women. The struggle should continue — Governments, corporations and individuals all had their parts to play — until the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been fulfilled for all the world's women.

37. **Mr. Bebars** (Egypt) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had afforded participating States an opportunity of reaffirming their political commitment to the advancement of women and the implementation of the principles of equality for all women everywhere. The international community had become aware of the need to address women's problems, promote gender equality and ensure that women were able to exercise their economic, social, political and cultural rights, thereby making it possible to achieve the development to which all the nations of the world aspired. Women had already made substantial gains in various fields, and had come to be acknowledged as an essential, effective and productive element of societies.

38. He welcomed the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and reaffirmed that Egypt was determined to implement the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Poverty was the greatest difficulty confronting the developing countries in their efforts to promote the advancement of women, and that difficulty could be overcome only through enhanced economic and social development at the national level and juster and more equitable conditions at the international level.

39. However, legislative measures alone would not be adequate to improve the status of women, and consequently resources should be expressly earmarked for the full implementation of the international community's commitments to the advancement of women. Specifically, technical and financial resources should be mobilized to address needs in such areas as education, health, occupational training, the creation of employment opportunities and the provision of basic services. In that connection, he recalled that at the twenty-third special session, the wife of the President of Egypt had proposed the establishment of a trust fund

for women, on the model of UNIFEM, that would act as an umbrella for institutions and programmes concerned with the implementation of strategies for the advancement of women, with a view to consolidating efforts to that end throughout the world.

40. Egypt's Constitution established the equality of all citizens and prohibited discrimination based on sex, religion, origin, language or creed. The right to education, the right to vote and the right of representation were guaranteed equally to women and to men, with the result that women had been able to assume positions of responsibility. Women's health and projects and measures relating to education also figured prominently in national policies. The President of the Republic's decision to establish a national council on women and the Parliament's adoption of a new personal status law were further unmistakable evidence of the State's commitment to the advancement of women.

41. It was cooperation based on mutual respect that had enabled peoples of different culture to work together for the advancement of human society. All peoples could and should retain their distinctiveness; diversity within the international community did not imply disunity. Furthermore, by the principle of equality in sovereignty and freedom, no civilization could regard itself as superior to another, regardless of their respective levels of economic, military or political development. For that reason, it was unacceptable for any country to seek to impose on the world's various peoples values that were in some instances at variance with God-given precepts, including a particular view of women's interests. Every society should respect the point of view and religious beliefs of other societies, in accordance with the principle of freedom of choice, and in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect which was the very basis of common action on the part of the States Members of the United Nations.

42. **Ms. Tarr-Whelan** (United States of America) described the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as the strongest policy statement on women's empowerment ever made by the international community, a statement that had been framed in the context of human rights and economic independence. In June 2000, five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, the international community had come together to assess the progress it had made in the interim, and on that occasion it had reaffirmed the objectives and strategies adopted at the Conference, and had set new goals with a view to helping women in such areas as health care, including HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, education, access to credit and participation in politics.

43. The presence of 4000 representatives of Governments and non-governmental organizations at the June 2000 meeting had shown that the idea that women's rights were human rights had finally solidified: it was no longer an abstract concept, but a fact embraced by the international community. Acts such as so-called "honour killings" and genital mutilation were no longer regarded as "cultural" matters but as human-rights abuses.

44. Somewhat unexpectedly, domestic violence was one of the areas in which the most progress had been made in the course of the previous five years. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session (A/S-23/2) reaffirmed that violence against women and girls, whether occurring in public or in private, was a human-rights issue; indeed, it criminalized such violence, particularly domestic violence. Similarly, trafficking in human beings had been acknowledged to be a global scourge that distorted economies, degraded societies, endangered neighbourhoods and robbed millions, mostly women and children, of their dreams. The international community must continue to work together on every continent to share information, coordinate legal action and shut down criminal networks.

45. It was gratifying that the outcome document called for closing the gender gap in education and increasing women's participation to bring about a balanced representation of both sexes in all sectors and occupations. There should be equal opportunity in the labour market, as well as equal opportunity in education, including equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.

46. Among the objectives adopted at the special session had been the promotion of women in the global economy. United States delegations participating in negotiations in different forums would work toward the advancement of that objective in accordance with a number of guiding principles: promotion of the participation of women in transborder trade, expansion of the use of electronic commerce by women, increased participation by women in business skills training, improved access by women to financing, provision of

special assistance to women from minority groups, and promotion of the participation of women in government procurement.

47. With respect to globalization, it was essential for all to acknowledge that it was a fact, not a policy option that could be reversed. At the same time, it was important to recognize that not all developing countries had been able to take advantage of the benefits of globalization to the same degree, and that some faced the risk of falling behind. Within countries, moreover, owing to historic patterns of discrimination, some vulnerable groups, including women, did not have equal access to those benefits, or the proper preparation and training that would enable them to participate fully in the positive aspects of the new economy. In many places, women were still not free to participate fully in the economy. And, due to gender biases in institutions, women workers were often less able to take advantage of economic opportunities, including those enhanced by globalization.

48. In conclusion, it was gratifying that the work of the twenty-third special session had produced a Political Declaration and an outcome document that emphasized a holistic, human-rights-based approach to gender equality, and recognized that society as a whole benefited from increased equality for women.

49. **Ms. Paterson** (New Zealand) said that owing to the five-year follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Millennium Summit and the forthcoming entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the year 2000 had provided the international community with an opportunity for renewed focus on women's human rights — an urgent necessity, as was apparent from the continuing problems of trafficking in women and children and violence against women.

50. The entry into force of the Optional Protocol, to which New Zealand had become the ninth State Party, represented a major advance in the protection and promotion of women's human rights. The recognized importance of those rights, and their broad acceptance by the international community, underlined the desirability of universal ratification of the Convention. New Zealand urged States which had not yet ratified it to do so, and urged States Parties to ratify the Optional Protocol.

51. CEDAW, which had played a key role in the formulation of the Optional Protocol, would see its workload increase once the instrument entered into force. New Zealand appreciated the Committee's efforts to prepare for the coming change, particularly through the consideration of revised rules or procedure. None the less, it was incumbent on the Organization to ensure that the Committee was provided with adequate resources to carry out its expanded role.

52. The twenty-third special session had constituted a useful review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. It was clear that much remained to be done before the Beijing agenda would be fully realized; however, there had been real progress in areas such as violence against women, including a focus on "honour crimes", while the importance of promoting women's health, the need to offer greater support to adolescents, recognition of the important contribution of indigenous women and the role of women in addressing poverty had come to be better understood. The prominent role of non-governmental organizations at the special session, as at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, also showed that Governments should work more closely with the organizations of civil society to advance women's rights and implement all the recommendations of the Platform.

53. The key role played by women in leadership positions had been recognized both during the special session and at the Millennium Summit, particularly at the meeting of women world leaders. In that connection, it was disappointing that the goal of equal gender distribution in the United Nations Secretariat by the year 2000 had not been met. New Zealand asked the Secretary-General and all components of the United Nations system urgently to implement practical strategies to bring about that result.

54. It was a matter of grave concern that nearly a third of States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had never reported to CEDAW. New Zealand welcomed the initiative by the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM to conduct a workshop for Pacific Island participants on reporting under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the near future, and was prepared to provide material assistance in support of it.

55. The role of women in resolving conflict had been acknowledged by the special session, and accordingly, mainstreaming a gender perspective in the United Nations' work for peace and security was of particular importance. Moreover, women and children suffered the impacts of violent conflict disproportionately, as the Commonwealth South Pacific Gender Symposium on Peace and Politics, held in June 2000, had emphasized. Accordingly, in assisting countries and communities to recover from conflict, the United Nations, international organizations and Member States must ensure the full involvement of women and girls and take specific measures to address their particular needs.

56. **Mr. Al-Hageri** (United Arab Emirates) said that the issue of the advancement of women and the role of women in economic, social and cultural development was taken very seriously in the United Arab Emirates. For example, laws had been adopted enabling women to exercise their legitimate rights, including the right to own property, the right to social security, the right to enter the labour market in the public and private sectors, and so on.

57. International statistics showed that illiteracy among women in the United Arab Emirates was less than 10 per cent, while enrolment rates for women at universities, technical institutes and other institutions of higher education had doubled. Women had become an integral part of the socio-economic development process.

58. The United Arab Emirates had been one of the first countries in the region to encourage women to participate in national, regional and international conferences and workshops, and was implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, having due regard for the Islamic character and the Arab customs and traditions of its society.

59. The Beijing Platform for Action contained proposals aimed at enhancing the status of women and promoting participation by women in the development process. However, many developing countries were confronted with difficulties as a result of their burden of debt, poverty and inadequate funds, in addition to civil or regional wars in some instances. All the above had disastrous consequences, including contagious diseases, illiteracy and the like, not only for women but for society as a whole. It was thus essential for such conflicts to be resolved and occupied territories evacuated by peaceful means. Developed countries and international organizations working to promote development, for their part, should provide appropriate development assistance, thereby enabling the recipient countries to foster participation by women in the task of achieving sustainable development.

60. His delegation was concerned at the suffering endured daily by women throughout the world, including, in particular, those living under occupation in appalling economic and social conditions, such as Palestinian Arab women in the Palestinian Arab occupied territories. Those women were the victims of crimes and aggression committed by the Israeli occupation forces, who, as recent incidents had shown, continued to violate the principles and rules of international humanitarian law, specifically, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the protection of civilian persons (especially women and children) in time of war. The international community should assume its responsibilities in that connection by making every effort to find a peaceful, just, comprehensive solution based on United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

61. **Ms. Uluiviti** (Fiji) said that her delegation wished to align itself with the statement that had been made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The advancement of women and the universality of women's rights was a new concept for Fiji, one that had been presented by modern civilization along with the issues of international trade, development, poverty eradication, peace and security, aid, human rights and good governance, all of which had been become more pressing as a result of globalization and trade liberalization, straining the traditional pillars of society. Fiji recognized its obligations for participation in international standards and shared responsibility for the principles enshrined in the Charter, including the principle of the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; at the same time, it had not forgotten its indigenous knowledge.

62. In pursuing the advancement of women, Fiji looked to the United Nations, with its resources, skills and foresight. It was gratifying that the Security Council was shortly to discuss the issue of women, peace and conflict.

63. Fiji had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1995, and steps were well in train to realize

its obligations thereunder. The Ministry for Women had developed a 10-year National Implementation of the Plan of Action for Women, and had established a Women's Advisory Council.

64. Since acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Fiji had withdrawn its two initial reservations, and in the course of the next few months would be considering whether to accede to the Optional Protocol. Moreover, it had submitted its first report to CEDAW.

65. The difficult times that Fiji had recently endured had not shaken its commitment to advancing the cause of women through peaceful dialogue, global partnerships, building sustainable communities, human rights, culture, good neighbourliness, a culture of peace, and new tools, especially information technology.

66. Fiji called for the strengthening and revitalization of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), in particular for developing nations, for whose specific interests the Institute had been established.

67. **Ms. Gómez Maganda** (Mexico) said that the actions and initiatives defined in the course of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly would undoubtedly contribute to reaching the goals set by the Government of Mexico in connection with the advancement of the status of Mexican women.

68. The Government would continue to work in the framework of the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, while also taking into account the priorities established in the Regional Programme of Action, the Santiago Consensus and the Lima Consensus, all of which were based on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

69. During the preceding five years, the Government of Mexico had strengthened the legal framework for the protection of women, and had constructed an institutional web aimed at giving material reality to the principle, enshrined in the Constitution, of the equality of men and women before the law. The National Programme for Women was aimed at helping women and girls to escape from poverty by giving them access to education, health services, training and employment opportunities on an equal footing with men, and by combating violence against them.

70. The Government intended to focus on the educational gap affecting indigenous women and girls, and on the elimination of sexist or stereotyped practices, attitudes and values that hindered the full development of their potential. It would also strengthen its efforts to guarantee women, by 2015 at the latest, universal access to primary health services of high quality throughout their lives, including sexual and reproductive health services, in accordance with the recommendations of the special session of the General Assembly. Moreover, the Government would continue to emphasize the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into macroeconomic, trade and fiscal policies, and achieving a more equal distribution of domestic tasks and family responsibilities between women and men. It was aware of the relevance of enforcing the revision of local legislation in order to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, domestic violence in particular, and to ensure that aggressors were brought to justice and victims given treatment. At the same time, it would continue to promote training and gender sensitization for persons responsible for the administration of justice, to enable them to deal more adequately with the victims of violence. The Government deemed it necessary to act not only in the area of social rights, but also in the cultural, political and economic spheres, through legal and budgetary actions and the preparation and implementation of appropriate programmes. Indeed, all the countries that had been represented at the eighth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean had committed themselves to placing social and gender equity at the centre of their concerns by reorienting their public policies so as to take account of their differential impact on men and women.

71. Various projects had been carried out with support from international cooperation agencies, including a project for institutional strengthening in gender, implemented with support from a donation of the Japanese Government through the World Bank, which had focused on reproductive health, women's access to the labour market, and action against poverty. As a complement to that project, the Government, with the assistance of the World Bank and non-governmental women's organizations, had organized a seminar to consider such issues as labour markets, education, health, poverty and rural development, with

a view to defining methodological guidelines for the incorporation of a gender perspective in policy in those areas.

72. Another project, one that had generated interest in several Latin American and Caribbean countries, had been directed toward the development of a system of indicators to follow up the situation of women. The project, which had been implemented with the collaboration of the national office of statistics and several agencies of the United Nations system, sought to evaluate the impact of the high-priority actions of the National Programme for Women and to facilitate the formulation of public policy relating to education, employment, political participation, family health and housing.

73. **Mr. Shang Le** (China) noted that the countries which had participated in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, despite their different historical backgrounds, levels of economic development and cultural traditions, had displayed great flexibility and had drawn up, on the basis of consensus, an outcome document entitled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action". The next problem was how to implement the actions and initiatives as agreed at the special session. Poverty, so far from declining, was increasing steadily, and a large percentage of its victims were women. The efforts of the international community aimed at the empowerment of women should, in the short term, be focused on the following areas: (1) poor women should be helped to shake off poverty as soon as possible, as otherwise it would be difficult for them to enjoy full political, social and cultural rights; (2) developed countries should provide the assistance necessary for the advancement of women in developing countries, and should demonstrate the necessary political will by honouring their commitments in earnest. In formulating economic, financial and trade policies, they should make sure that those policies did not have an inverse impact, direct or indirect, on the women of developing countries; (3) women should be given more opportunities to participate in the process of achieving gender equality, and (4) the United Nations' role in safeguarding peace and security should be maintained, as only thus would it be possible to create an environment of peaceful development.

74. Equality between men and women remained one of the basic policies of the Chinese Government, and accordingly, it had formulated a programme for the advancement of Chinese women for 1995-2000 as its plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. After five years of endeavours, women's involvement in decision-making had expanded, the number of poor women had been reduced, especially in rural areas, and women's level of education had increased. After the return of Hong Kong and Macao, the Governments of the two Special Administrative Regions had also actively striven to implement the decisions of the Fourth World Conference on Women, and had achieved substantial progress in advancing the cause of women.

75. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that measures aimed at the advancement of women should take into account the distinctive characteristics of different countries. The Sudan considered that women and girls possessed their rights when a society as a whole was in a position to exercise its rights to the full. Hence the crucial importance of the principle of justice, which was the basis of the Sudan's policy in all areas, including the status of women.

76. The twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had resulted in the adoption of an outcome document (S-23/2) outlining further actions and initiatives for the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In that connection, the outcome document identified some challenges and obstacles that had arisen since the Fourth World Conference on Women, despite tireless national and international efforts aimed at the eradication of poverty, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and the promotion of women's full participation and empowerment.

77. The Secretary-General's report (A/55/341) emphasized the importance of strengthening international cooperation, and recommended that international organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, should mobilize adequate resources to enable Governments to implement the outcome document of the special session. Unfortunately, the developing and least developed countries were not in a position fully to implement the Beijing Platform for Action owing in part to the debt-servicing burdens that forced them to curtail their social programmes, but also, in the case of some countries, to the economic sanctions and arbitrary unilateral measures that were crippling their development efforts.

78. Globalization had undeniably broadened the economic horizons of some States, but most countries, and the developing and least developed countries in particular, had been left out of the new world economic order and the remarkable technological progress that was being made in the communications sector. The marginalization of those countries would inevitably have a direct impact on all sectors of society, especially women and children, and consequently collective international measures should be taken to rectify the situation.

79. The eradication of poverty and the elimination of all forms of violence against women were prerequisites for the advancement of women in all areas of society. The reality was that the contemporary age was characterized by the proliferation of conflicts and wars that were being used by some for political and economic ends, at the expense of women, children and families. The Sudan, for its part, remained committed to the highest human values and determined to combat negative social phenomena that were detrimental to the dignity of women and destructive of society.

80. **Mr. Ramachandra Reddy** (India) noted that the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had resulted in agreement on new initiatives to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, including a number of important targets, such as closure of the gender gap in education by 2005, ensuring free and universal primary education by 2015, a 50 per cent improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, removal of discriminatory legislative provisions by 2005 and universal access to high-quality health care by 2015. The Millennium Declaration, for its part, had called for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease.

81. However, the UNIFEM report entitled "Progress of the World's Women" had pointed out that with globalization the inequalities between men and women had actually grown, while the World Bank had highlighted the fact that by 2015 the world's poor, most of them women, would number 1.9 billion.

82. For many countries, globalization had brought marginalization and growing inequalities. With diminishing resources constraining their ability to promote social development, how could they be expected to attain the goals of the major conferences, especially if they received no international assistance? However, developed countries would have an opportunity of demonstrating their willingness to extend a helping hand at the forthcoming consultative meetings in preparation for the High-level Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development.

83. India had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and consequently there was no need to enumerate the interlocking array of policies and programmes currently under way; suffice it to say that the Government was currently examining the Committee's comments to see how best they could be implemented. The year 2001 had been designated "Women's Empowerment Year", and a two-pronged strategy was being pursued: a gender perspective was being mainstreamed in all policies and programmes, cutting across all sectors and levels, while simultaneously women-specific interventions were being effected. That strategy had yielded good results in such areas as women's literacy rates, reproductive health and access to microcredit. Moreover, the "Integrated Child Development Service" programme, with over one million village-level workers, was one of the largest programmes of its kind in the world.

84. A note of caution was in order concerning the current trend of the Security Council to overreach its mandate by addressing matters that essentially fell within the purview of the General Assembly. To be sure, the Security Council might keep itself informed of developments taking place in bodies under the Economic and Social Council, but should refrain from policy directions or pronouncements when discussing the subject of women in armed conflict on 24 October 2000. It was the promotional aspect of the advancement of women that needed to be given priority, not the drawing of imaginary tangential lines with security issues. Such a distortion of priorities was clearly illustrated in the situation of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, which was facing the prospect of extinction while resources and attention were diverted elsewhere.

85. **Ms. D'Urso** (Observer for the Holy See) said that, with reference to agenda item 108, poverty, social, political and economic inequalities, violence and discrimination still existed, despite efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Consequently, it was gratifying that the twenty-third

special session of the General Assembly had affirmed that the unsustainable debt burden faced by developing countries, the increasing numbers of women fleeing war, the multidimensional impact of globalization, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the decreasing levels of funding available through international cooperation continued to stifle efforts toward sustainable development, equality and peace.

86. The Holy See was pleased with the outcome document adopted by the special session, as it mentioned the importance of a holistic view of the health needs of women, and education for all as a basis for development. It also acknowledged the need for all women to have access to basic social services, and the need to combat violence against women and the trafficking of women and girls. Moreover, it was gratifying that the outcome document acknowledged the need to promote the critical role of women in the family, the social significance of motherhood, and the need for programmes designed to support families in conflict situations and, in daily life, programmes designed to enable women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities. At the same time, it was disconcerting to observe the determined efforts of some countries to remove each of the above references. A growing number of countries were firmly committed to addressing the root causes of trafficking in women and girls for prostitution, forced marriages and forced labour. It was very unfortunate that a few countries had attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to limit references to prostitution.

87. It was disappointing that it had not been possible to reach consensus on debt relief, restrictions on trading in small arms, including land mines, and the protection of the right of any health professional or health facility to refuse to perform services on the basis of religious belief or moral or ethical conviction. The Holy See affirmed that the right of conscience of health-service providers was assured by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the constitutional and legislative guarantees of several countries.

88. While the Holy See would certainly continue to offer education and health care and to work toward the eradication of poverty, the fact remained that no individual or nation was in a position to meet alone the challenges involved in reaching the goals of gender equality, development and peace. What was required was solidarity among the entire human community and an international awareness of the dignity of the human person.

89. **Ms. Molaroni** (San Marino) said that, with reference to agenda item 107, her delegation's participation in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had enabled it to realize, once again, how valuable all cultural contributions were, and how important it was to avoid oppressive or levelling attempts in that connection. The United Nations could have a central role in eliminating gender inequalities and redefining social and traditional rules, thereby contributing to the advent of a balanced social order and the progressive development of society. Women, for their part, had been a major factor in the significant progress that had been made in recent decades.

90. Thanks to the country's favourable economic situation, many San Marino women held medium and high-ranking positions in both the public and private sectors. The whole population had access to social security and social support, while women could benefit from all necessary services. Moreover, wage equality between male and female workers had been achieved, as had trade union equality. Education was extremely high and diversified, and offered a wide range of opportunities to both sexes. The only area that still lagged behind was legal equality: women still did not have the right to transmit their nationality. However, the Government was working on new legislation aimed at correcting that situation.

91. The Republic of San Marino, believing as it did that international cooperation, active negotiation and constructive dialogue were the best ways to proceed toward the advancement of women throughout the world, was prepared to contribute in all possible ways to the attainment of that goal.

92. **Ms. Farhadi** (Afghanistan) said that, with reference to agenda item 107, during the whole of the preceding year, Afghan women had continued to suffer the appalling consequences of the military occupation regime of the Taliban, who went to great lengths to prevent women and girls from participating in the country's social, cultural, educational, economic and political life. The 95 per cent of all women who had formerly worked had lost their employment, and the Taliban had recently issued a decree prohibiting women from working in United Nations programmes or in those of non-governmental organizations. Moreover, women continued to be denied access to

health care, and, in the part of Afghanistan held by the Taliban, girls' schools had been closed.

93. Her delegation wished to acknowledge publicly the efforts of the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on behalf of Afghan women. It was gratifying that UNIFEM was aware of a need for dialogue, in some Islamic countries, aimed at taking Islamic views into account. In October 1999, advocates of women's rights, religious leaders and politicians had come together in Amman, Jordan, for a symposium on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the framework of the Sharia. Her delegation would like to see the Organization of the Islamic Conference organize a meeting at which that issue would be discussed by male and female representatives from Islamic countries. Such a meeting would afford a means of offsetting the extremist and outmoded view of Islam held by the Taliban.

94. As they pursued their offensive, the Taliban were continuing to commit crimes against the civilian population of Afghanistan: witness the thousands of families that had been displaced in July, August and September, and the atrocities committed against civilians in Talogan, in the northeastern part of the country. Consequently, it was essential for the international community to provide the refugees with further assistance.

95. **Ms. Haj-Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the question of the advancement of women had been given high priority in the Syrian Arab Republic. According to the statistics contained in the report that her delegation had presented at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, girls were attending schools, universities and educational outreach establishments in growing numbers, while women accounted for between 60 and 80 per cent of the students enrolled in technical and vocational training institutes and teacher training schools. Illiteracy among women was in decline. Moreover, a national literacy plan had been developed in cooperation with UNESCO, and the resources required for its implementation had already been made available.

96. Syrian women participated in public life and exercised their political, social, cultural and economic rights under democratic conditions. National legislation had been modernized to reflect the country's evolution in various sectors. For example, 24.6 per cent of all lawyers and 19 per cent of all judges were women. Moreover, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, had carried out a number of projects designed to foster employment among women, especially women with disabilities, who were expressly targeted by an array of poverty alleviation programmes offering them training and refresher education. Lastly, there had been a percentage increase in the numbers of women working in the health sector, and centres specializing in women's health and family planning represented 75 per cent of all health care service establishments.

97. The participants in the Fourth World Conference on Women had reaffirmed that foreign occupation prevented women from exercising their fundamental rights. Her delegation wished to draw the Committee's attention to the tragic situation of Arab women living under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan and the Palestinian territories. Those women were daily in danger of death at the hands of the Israeli forces, as was evident from many recent incidents, and they were denied their rights to freedom, education and health care. Syrian women's associations, in cooperation with the relevant international organizations and human rights organizations, were keeping a close watch on the situation of Syrian women in the occupied Syrian Golan, and were doing everything in their power to bring the occupation to an end and thereby enable those women to regain their rights, inasmuch as occupied territories could enjoy the fruits of development only in a climate of peace and freedom.

98. The climate of democracy prevalent in the Syrian Arab Republic and the principle of gender were enshrined in the Constitution. National organizations of every kind regarded both women and men as the pillars of society, and considered that their first priority should be the country's social development and progress.

99. **Mr. García González** (El Salvador) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement that had been made by the delegation of Colombia in its capacity as acting Secretary of the Rio Group, and the statement that had been made by the delegation of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. In El Salvador, where women accounted for 52.2 per cent of the total population and 37 per cent of the working population, the issue of women's advancement was deemed highly important, and there was a continuing

drive to incorporate a gender perspective into all areas of the country's national life and all its institutions. For example, the El Salvador Institute for the Advancement of Women was devoting particular attention to the task of coordinating the implementation of a national policy on women based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In cooperation with the competent Government bodies and non-governmental organizations, the Institute had coordinated the preparation of the national report that had been presented at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

100. Various legislative measures aimed at the advancement of women had been adopted in recent years. Such measures included El Salvador's accession to and subsequent ratification of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (the Belem do Pará Convention), a law on domestic violence, a law governing procedure in domestic cases, and the designation of 25 November as the National Day of Non-violence against Women. Consultations with the relevant national institutions were currently in progress with a view to the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women. The various measures that had been taken by public bodies and non-governmental organizations for the advancement of women and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective added up to concrete progress in the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action.

101. With respect to INSTRAW's current critical situation, the Government of El Salvador considered that the Institute merited continued support in view of the invaluable work it had done for the numerous developing countries that had requested its assistance. Accordingly, the Government supported the initiative of the Group of 77 and China aimed at finding a favourable solution to the question of INSTRAW's funding within the limits of the current resources of United Nations organizations.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.